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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: EDITOR OF ONE OF AZERBAIJAN'S LEAST REPUTABLE
NEWSPAPERS SENTENCED TO 30 MONTHS' IMPRISONMENT

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION DONALD LU PER 1.4(B,D).

¶1. (SBU) On November 6, Editor-In-Chief of Ideal newspaper Nazim Guliyev was sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment on libel charges. Ideal newspaper is known as one of Azerbaijan's least reputable newspapers, as Guliyev is widely believed to accept bribes to slander opposition figures, other journalists, and government officials - but never President Aliyev. He also is rumored to have backing from pro-Kurdish GOAJ officials. This suit was filed by Ministry of Internal Affairs Police Department Head Ramiz Zeynalov, on the basis of recent articles criticizing corruption among traffic police, which Guliyev published, but did not author. Guliyev previously served 30 months in prison after being convicted of extortion in 2002; he was released by Presidential pardon.

¶2. (C) The Institute for Reporter Freedom and Safety (IRFS) issued a public statement noting that the articles in question violated the journalistic code of ethics, and that Ideal newspaper had done so many times before. However, IRFS maintained its position that journalists should not be imprisoned for their work, and called for the GOAJ to release Guliyev and the seven other imprisoned journalists. IRFS Director Emin Huseynov told us that he has received criticism from some NGO activists and journalists for choosing to include Guliyev's case in IRFS' statements.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: In many ways, Guliyev's case is representative of the problems plaguing Azerbaijan's media environment. There are publications - Ideal being one of the leading examples - that seem to function as little more than platforms for Azerbaijan's ruling elite to snipe at their rivals, and journalists in these papers are widely believed to accept payments to write and publish libelous stories. Criminal cases, however, are not the solution. Guliyev's case highlights the need to decriminalize libel and develop an alternative dispute resolution mechanism to resolve libel complaints, as well as to strengthen the professionalism of journalists. Guliyev's imprisonment brings Azerbaijan's total number of journalists jailed for their work to eight.
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